

Ingredients for High and Low Quality Out-of-School Programming

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Abstract

An increasing percentage of our nation's children are participating in some form of out-of-school time (OST) programming. One estimate reports that from 1995 to 2005, the percent of K-8 students participating in OST programs rose from six to 20 percent. One of the most prevalent forms of OST programs are after-school programs (ASPs). Traditionally, ASPs vary in terms of providers and offerings. Many are community-based or take place within schools. Activities include academics, sports, arts, enrichment, or some combination of each. As a result of this convergence of stakeholders and purposes within the after-school field, assessing program quality has been notably difficult. The purpose of the current research was to investigate the strength of school and after-school partnerships in place within six ASPs and the subsequent connection between these partnerships and after-school program quality. This mixed-methods study draws from the findings of an evaluation of a multi-site school-based after-school program in a large Midwestern city as a result of funding from a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant. Data include program observations, staff questionnaires, site director interviews, and a student survey regarding the after-school environment. Findings reveal that programs with strong partnerships between the school day and after-school staff showed higher quality after-school program implementation. Conversely, when school day staff demonstrated avoidant behaviors near the after-school programs run in their schools, or considered them to be little more than after-school child care, after-school programs showed lower quality implementation. In addition to identifying positive characteristics of school/after-school partnerships linked to overall program quality, an analysis matrix compiling high and low quality "ingredients" was created based upon these findings. Varying degrees of program features appeared to mediate a program's implementation fidelity, level of student engagement, structural constraints, and overall program quality.

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